



Summer 2001

# THE LEGAL LINE

*A Newsletter of Legal Services Corporation*

Volume 3, Number 3

Washington, D.C.



**A Message  
from the  
President**

**John N.  
Erlenborn**

## *A Bipartisan Renaissance*

On June 27, in a little-noticed subcommittee vote in the U.S. House of Representatives, the final broad strokes were applied to what could best be described as a bipartisan renaissance for legal services in the nation's capital.

For the first time in six years, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and Judiciary green-lighted level funding for Legal Services Corporation (LSC) to carry out its mission of helping low-income Americans with their critical legal problems. Weeks later, the full House Appropriations Committee unanimously followed suit.

Buoyed by strong leadership from President Bush, who called on Congress to continue funding LSC at the current annual level of \$330 million, and the much-

**MESSAGE, p. 9**

## **Keeping the Faith** LSC's faith-based outreach gives clients hope

*By Catherine Sulzer  
and Sean Driscoll*

Disaster struck a vulnerable octogenarian couple in Albany, Ga., twice in the Year of the Flood, 1995.

The big trouble rode in on the tail of Hurricane Mitch that July when days of unflinching thunderstorms pooled towering reservoirs of floodwater that eventually ravaged the couple's house and thousands of others in a "federal disaster" of epic proportions. The double whammy came months later when the contractor hired by the elderly couple reneged on an agreement to finish work on their severely damaged home.

With the husband confined to a walker and the couple struggling on a modest income and unable to afford an attorney, catastrophe loomed. So acting on an in-

**“Without  
churches, I'd be in  
big trouble, be-  
cause they are the  
best way to reach  
clients.”**

**Giovanni Perry, Legal  
Aid of Western Oklahoma**

stinct shared by millions of Americans, the pair turned to their faith community in time of crisis.

Their church provided salvation, referring them to an Albany interfaith coalition that partnered with the LSC-funded Georgia Legal Services Program. Attorneys took the case and helped them get back under their own roof for the price they had been quoted in their original contract.

"When disaster strikes, people seek solace in their faith," observes Mark Redden, managing attor-



*Passaic County (N.J.) Legal Aid Society staffers partner with the St. Paul's Community Development Corp. (above), while Dallas-area seniors attend a legal workshop at Salem Institutional Baptist Church sponsored by Legal Services of North Texas (below).*



ney at the Albany Office of the Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP). "Often they know of no other place to turn. Faith-based organizations need to know that they can rely on local legal services offices during their times of drastic need."

With President George W. Bush's much-discussed "charitable choice" proposal awaiting consideration in Congress, faith-based initiatives have been big talk in recent months in the power

**FAITH, p. 10**



**PAGE 6**



**John N. Erlenborn (far left)  
assumes LSC Presidency.**

# LSC Tackles Diversity Challenges

By Sean Driscoll

In an effort to better serve an increasingly diverse client population, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) co-sponsored a successful two-day conference May 31 and June 1 entitled "Diversity in the Legal Services Community."

The conference, held on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., was attended by 51 legal services leaders from across the country and was one of a series of yearlong national diversity conversations jointly sponsored by LSC and the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA). The purpose of the meetings was to examine the impact of diversity issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation on the legal services community – and to develop recommendations on how these important issues can be better addressed. (See graphic at right.)

"We serve clients from every imaginable background, and one of our biggest tests is to recognize the challenges that each of our client communities faces," said LSC VP of Programs Randi Youells, who spearheaded the conference. "By studying what makes each of our clients unique and tailoring programs to meet those needs, we will be able to provide them with better legal representation, which is why we're here in the first place."

The conference was facilitated by two consultants, who pressed participants to brainstorm solutions to the problems of recruiting diverse staff and ensuring diverse leadership, while remaining focused on the goal of improved client service.

Conferees also examined three external issues: the lack of a common definition of diversity within legal services, loss of trust among clients due to the perception that legal services providers have stopped dealing directly with race-based issues, and the importance of ensuring that justice communities become more inclusive and multiculturally competent.

Outgoing LSC President John McKay stressed how diverse staffs are uniquely situated to serve the legal needs of diverse clientele. "We must think in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, and sexual orientation because these characteristics often carry with them their



*At his last function with LSC field staff, outgoing President John McKay (above, left) chats about the importance of diversity in legal services.*



*LSC Board members Maria Luisa Mercado (above, right) and LaVeeda M. Battle (below, with NLADA's Don Saunders), make diversity a priority.*



*Lillian Johnson, director of Community Legal Services in Phoenix, discusses diversity issues with Phil Bond, an attorney with the Macon Office of Georgia Legal Services (below).*



own legal problems," he said in his last formal remarks to field staff before stepping down as President. "It is our job to solve these problems."

Issues of geography, language and technology were often mentioned as the most serious obstacles. "Operating out of a rural location makes it hard to recruit diverse staff members," explained Estela Casas of Greater Bakersfield Legal Services in Bakersfield, Calif. "Most people would rather go to Los Angeles or San Francisco."

Claudeen Arthur of DNA-People's Legal Services in Window Rock, Ariz., has an even tougher time grappling with diversity problems working with Native Americans. "Many clients speak their native [Indian] languages, and even with minimal English, cannot deal with complicated legal issues," she said. "We need staff that speak their languages."

## Recommendations

*The following recommendations were submitted to LSC staff by conferees at the conclusion of the LSC/NLADA Diversity Conference May 31-June 1.*

.....

Explore possibility of training LSC employees to speak other languages and become certified interpreters to more fully assist clients

Explore opportunities for training grantee boards on diversity concerns to help them guide LSC programs

Highlight models of diversity in hiring and retaining staff and in bridging language and cultural barriers

Continue to work to design and implement a loan forgiveness program for new and existing staff

Increase emphasis to grantees of the importance of culturally competent staff at all program levels

# The Little (Search) Engine That Could

With LSC grant, I-CAN! computers kiosks help California's poor help themselves

By Stephanie Serrano

Venture out to the Superior Court building in Orange County, Calif., to witness LSC's maiden voyage into the realm of Web-assisted self-empowerment.

You may not find legal services clients sitting at computer kiosks chanting the mantra, "I think I can! I think I can!" but don't be surprised to find more than a few successfully scaling mountains of legal woe with a few quick clicks of the mouse.

In California, as in every state, the vast majority of low-income individuals have no recourse when they find themselves facing serious legal problems. In fact, shortages in legal aid resources force more than three-quarters of California's poor to represent themselves or forsake the justice system all together when confronted with a civil legal crisis.

Legal Aid Society of Orange County (LASOC) understands this conundrum all too well. So last November, the LSC-funded program partnered with the Superior Court of California and Orange County to launch I-CAN! – an Internet-based computer system designed to broaden the reach of legal services and give *pro se* clients the tools they need to represent their own interests in court.

"[I-CAN!] showed me how to do it, where I needed to go, and what forms I needed," LASOC client Kim Dinh said. "Everything I needed was right here."

I-CAN! is a multilingual, interactive system providing tutorials to help clients find forms appropriate to their needs and format pleadings and other legal documents properly. With its touch-screen interface, I-CAN! also answers frequently asked questions, offers court tours, and educates users on the law. Video conferencing technology is also being integrated into I-CAN! to enable users to obtain immediate assistance from Help Center staff at LASOC – technology that holds tremendous potential to reach new clients currently not served by an LSC program.

LSC officials have taken notice of the project's swift success. In July, the Corporation awarded LASOC \$300,000 in technology grants to expand the I-CAN! project into other areas of California, particularly the state's rural inland areas (such as Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) and the outlying areas of Los



## Innovation

I-CAN! Computer Kiosks

## Program

Legal Aid Society of Orange County

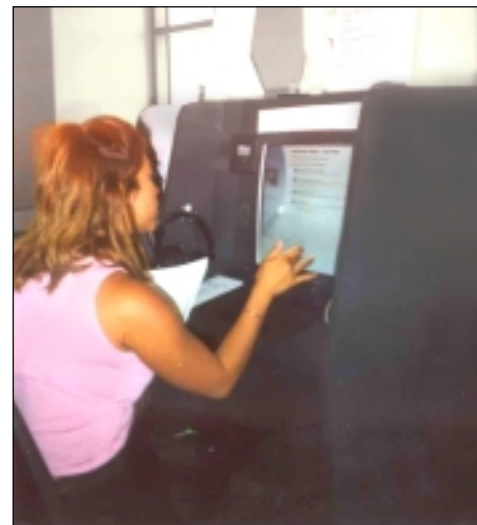
## Description

A multilingual, interactive, self-help system that provides tutorials that aid clients in formatting pleadings and finding forms appropriate to their needs. With its touch-screen interface, I-CAN! also answers frequently asked questions and educates users on the law. In addition, video conferencing technology is being integrated into I-CAN! to enable users to obtain live assistance from an LSC attorney over the Internet.

Angeles and San Francisco. Since I-CAN!'s inception, LSC has provided a total of \$475,000 in federal support.

"Three of the major goals we've set for our programs are to better use technology, strive for more even statewide service, and provide better resources for self-representing clients," said Randi Youells, LSC's Vice President of Programs. "I-CAN! tackles all three priorities in one fell swoop. This is cutting edge-technology that will enable our clients to walk into court and represent themselves, and to communicate with LSC staff live over the Internet if they live too far from one of our offices for an in-person consultation."

I-CAN! technology complements the traditional clinic or one-on-one settings in which lawyers typically meet clients. Said Dinh: "I think it's great. It saves a lot of people a lot of time. You don't have to wait in line, you can just come up here and do it yourself." Utilizing the technology does not require a home computer or particularly strong computer skills. Spe-



A client in Orange County uses I-CAN! to file documents with the court.

cial kiosks with easy-to-use touch screens are being placed in public facilities – like courthouses, libraries, and shelters – so any eligible client can walk right up and use I-CAN! The list of deployment sites is growing as the project progresses. In addition to the Superior Court locations, the Orange County District Attorney's Family Support Division, Fullerton Library, Irvine City Hall, and San Juan Capistrano Library are all hosting either I-CAN! kiosks or computer work stations.

Included in the I-CAN! system is a video guide feature, in the form of an on-screen helper who speaks all the written text, counsels the user, and adds to the understandability of I-CAN! for all clients, regardless of their literacy level.

"The talking head was very helpful because it guided me through the whole process," user Stacey Lopez says. "In 1994, I had to fill out forms and needed somebody to help me, and it took a long time." With I-CAN!, the user can replay the video as many times as needed to understand what is required.

Since its first deployment, I-CAN! has been remarkably well-received. Of 177 user surveys returned to LASOC, 96 percent of respondents stated that I-CAN! was either "helpful" or "very helpful" in assisting them with their problems. "It guides me very well, instead of the thick pamphlet I would have to fill out at home," said Lopez, who used I-CAN! to file for a restraining order and plans to return to fill out paperwork for her divorce.

# Inside the C

## D.C. Park Cleanup Launches Service Program

Leaving their briefcases and work clothes in the closet, nearly a dozen Legal Services Corporation employees departed their homes unusually early one Saturday in May to go off to work.

Armed with trash bags and rakes, they arrived at historic Meridian Hill Park in northwest Washington determined to spend their day off work...well, working to give something back to the community.

The team mulched, weeded, raked, and cleaned for several hours and also raised and donated funds to Greater D.C. Cares to support the management of future volunteer service in the park. Although Meridian Hill Park was once considered a high-crime area, community involvement from groups like LSC has helped restore the park and reduce crime there by an estimated 95 percent.

The Meridian Hill Park beautification project served as the inaugural event for a new group called LSC GIVES – a community service and pro bono program formed and run by LSC staff. The program encourages LSC employees to spend time volunteering in their local communities, while also encouraging LSC attorneys and paralegals to volunteer and offer free assistance to low-income families with legal problems.

"It is our way of doing something tangible to help our employees walk the walk," said Mattie Condray, chair of LSC Gives and LSC Senior Assistant General Counsel.

LSC Gives also enlists staffers (and their family members) to participate in a host of individual community service projects besides the group projects like the Meridian Hill cleanup. This list includes the DC AIDS Ride, GED Tutoring, and volunteer work with the Montgomery County Public Schools, the Washington Center for Aging Services, the Washington Family Institute, and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

-- Perry Wasserman

## Staff Spotlight



## Pat Hanrahan

**Job Title:** Special Assistant to the VP of Programs

**Description:** Assist with range of projects, including examining the effects of gender and diversity issues on legal services and promoting state planning.



## LSC's Globetrotter

The work of legal aid professionals can be fulfilling on many levels, but for Legal Services Corporation's most itinerant staffer, hitting the road simultaneously provides a rich perspective on her life's work and the world's many cultures.

Attorney Pat Hanrahan just returned from an International Legal Aid Group Conference in Australia, only months after being promoted to the position of Special Assistant to LSC Vice President of Programs Randi Youells.

In her new position, Hanrahan has many roles, including planning special events like the recent LSC/NLADA

Challenges are faced by LSC and its legal services counterparts around the world. Legal aid leaders from 10 different countries (Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Scotland, Wales, and the United States) attended the meeting to share strategies on how to better utilize technology, institute program evaluations and performance measures to ensure better service, and reach out to indigenous populations and clients living in remote areas.

Hanrahan's Australian odyssey was merely the latest stamp in the passport of LSC's peripatetic program professional. In the last decade alone, Hanrahan has been to Acapulco and Oaxaca in Mexico, to Guinea in West Africa to visit her son in the Peace Corps, to Guatemala for a two-week vacation, and to Vietnam with a group that included LSC program counsel Anh-Huong Tu.

"Vietnam has to be my favorite country, in terms of the usual standards like food, landscape, shopping, and art, but even more so because of the nature of the people, who were very gracious to us," Hanrahan said. "It was astounding to me that the Vietnamese people were so welcoming to, and forgiving of, American tourists after our country's violent history with them."

Hanrahan's globetrotting ways come in handy during her LSC career. As one of the chief organizers of LSC's ongoing diversity dialogue, she helps the organization understand the evolving cultural dynamics of client communities that are increasingly comprised of immigrants. She also has a special sensitivity to the importance of attracting a diverse staff at LSC.

"Working in LSC offices has been great because there is so much diversity," Hanrahan said. "While we may all come from different places, we all share the same mission."



*Hanrahan overlooking the harbor in Marseilles, France.*

"Diversity in Legal Services" Conference (see page 2). In each of her roles, though, staying closely attuned to the needs of LSC's clients remains Job 1.

"Traveling helps me understand more about other people's conditions," says Hanrahan, who began touring the world after college when she lived in Paris for two years. "Traveling opens a window into the experiences of clients and their families who come from other countries. It lets me get to know people and find out how alike we all are. The world becomes smaller and more friendly."

At the Australia conference, Hanrahan learned how similar the chal-

## Alaska Mourns Loss of Legal Services Leader

Alaska lost one of the pillars of its legal services community on June 9, when Robert Hickerson, executive director of Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), lost a seven-year battle with brain cancer.

Hickerson will be remembered for his tireless advocacy on behalf of indigent Alaskans, particularly Native American tribes. Last year, he received the Alaska Civil Liberties Union Equal Access to Justice Award for his commitment to serving the legal needs of Alaska's low-income citizens and



Hickerson

tribes. He was largely responsible for the installation of the Native American Rights Fund in Alaska and for helping to create one of the leading Native Law legal services programs in the country.

Hickerson was born on Oct. 12, 1950, in Altus, Okla., and graduated from Oklahoma University in 1973 and OU law school in 1976. In 1972, he was married to Elizabeth Johnston, and they moved to Alaska in 1981. Robert was hired on as chief counsel at ALSC, and three years later, he took over as executive director — a position he had held ever since.

Hickerson's life and work touched thousands of people with whom he came into contact. He leaves a legacy that will not soon be forgotten.



## United Way Recognizes LSC Effort

Each year, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) undertakes a meticulous effort to apportion more than \$330 million from Congress so the powerless can have their day in court.

But pooling resources on behalf of low-income Americans is more than just a day job for LSC employees, who, this spring, were recognized for reaching into their own pockets to lend a helping hand.

In March, the United Way of the National Capital Area presented LSC with two awards for its fundraising efforts during the 2000 United Way Campaign. LSC staff raised \$18,226 for United Way charities through gifts and paycheck deductions, earning a Platinum Award for giving more than \$100 per employee.

LSC also earned first place (tying with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) for "Best Campaign Kick-Off/Victory Celebration" as part of the United Way's 2000 Communications Contest recognizing unique campaign events, Web sites, and promotional literature. LSC kicked off its 2000 campaign with a festive gathering featuring games, raffles, an auction of baked goods, and a visit from Make-a-Wish Foundation President Ralph A. Nappi. LSC's campaign theme was "Be a Hero



Alice Dickerson, LSC Director of Human Resources, displays first-place award.

... Your Help is Their Hope."

The national United Way campaign raised a total of \$88.5 million last year. The money raised will fund programs that provide basic services (i.e., food, clothing and shelter) to the disadvantaged as well as programs that seek to build healthier communities and serve the needs of the challenged.

-- Sean Driscoll

## Program Notes

**Legal Aid Society of Columbus'** Capital Campaign has raised more than \$1 million for new office space. The main office in Columbus, Ohio, was badly in need of renovation, so the program embarked on a fundraising campaign. Thanks to combined pledges from the legal community, Legal Aid was able to purchase the building next to their own. The two buildings were renovated and connected together. A new conference room, library, children's play area, and private meeting rooms were added. Chairman John Elam said, "I am thrilled with the leadership of the large law firms and the strong support from the foundations and county government."

\* article adapted from "Legal Aid Wraps Up Capital Campaign" (Press Release, April 1, 2001, by Jane Foulk)

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation** was named the beneficiary of three grants from the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation on April 9. The grant money totals \$71,065 and will be used for three purposes: a telephone hotline serving 65 central and southern Illinois counties, assistance to the elderly in eight counties around Springfield, and landlord-tenant representation in Sangamon County. The grant award marks the first time that the state government helped underwrite the costs of providing civil legal advice and assistance to low-income clients in Illinois. LSC-funded Land of Lincoln was one of 19 legal assistance agencies in Illinois to receive grant money.

\* article adapted from "First Equal Justice grants awarded for legal aid" (ISBA Bar News, May 1, 2001, by Stephen Anderson).

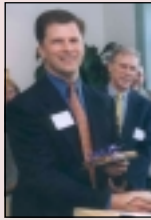
## FACT

The Legal Services Corporation was established in 1974 to provide lawyers in civil matters to people earning up to 125% of the federal poverty level...

In 2001, a family of four must earn **below \$22,063** in order to receive legal aid from one of the 207 LSC-funded programs.

Note: This figure represents 125% of the poverty guidelines for a family of four as determined by the Department of Health and Human Services.

# — Changing of the Guard in Portsmouth —

*Battle**McKay**Erlenborn*

Legal Services Corporation tapped one of its founding fathers as its newest President at a June 29-30 Board of Directors meeting in Portsmouth, N.H. Former U.S. Congressman **John N. Erlenborn** (R-IL), who served 10 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1965 to 1985, was chosen by LSC's 11-member bipartisan Board to succeed outgoing President **John McKay**, who stepped down to pursue the position of U.S. Attorney in Seattle. Erlenborn's commitment to legal services can be traced all the way back to LSC's founding in 1974, when he was one of the House managers of the legislation creating the Congressionally chartered non-profit Corporation. Also at the meeting, **LaVeeda Morgan Battle** was named new vice chair of the LSC Board, while American Bar Association President-elect **Bob Hirshon** (right) unveiled a pending ABA proposal for Congress to introduce a loan-forgiveness program for law students seeking to enter the legal services profession.



Clockwise from top left: LSC Board members **F. Wm. McCalpin**; **Nancy H. Rogers** and **Douglas S. Eakeley** (above); and **Edna Fairbanks-Williams** and **Ernestine P. Watlington** (left)

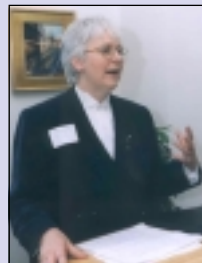


## Full Court Press

The entire 5-member New Hampshire Supreme Court came to Portsmouth June 29 to show their support for legal services and fellow Justice **John T. Broderick Jr.**, an LSC Board member. Pictured above (l to r): LSC President **John N. Erlenborn**, Chief Justice **David A. Brock**, Justice Broderick, Justice **Joseph P. Nadeau**, Justice **Linda S. Dalianis**, outgoing LSC President **John McKay**, Justice **James E. Duggan**, and LSC Board Chair **Douglas S. Eakeley**.



Left: New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice **John T. Broderick, Jr.** (left) receives a gift for his record eight-year tenure on the LSC Board.



Clockwise from left: **Marilyn McNamara**, new director of New Hampshire's Legal Advice & Referral Center, speaks; NH Chief Justice **David Brock** chats with Erlenborn and Eakeley (above); and Board members **Thomas Smegal**, **Maria Luisa Mercado**, and **LaVeeda Battle** listen intently (left).



# States Focus on Equal Justice

## DENVER, CO



**Mary Mullarkey**, Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court (left), welcomes legal services leaders from across the state (above) at an equal justice conference on May 11 at University of Denver law school.



**Barbara Chamberlin** and **JoAnne Salazar** of the Colorado Bar Association greet conferees with song: "Somewhere over the rainbow, I can see; there's a land where there's justice, even for folks like me."

## LINCOLN, NE



Above right: Nebraska Legal Services, led by Executive Director **Doug German** (center), spearheaded a statewide equal justice meeting June 8 in Lincoln that attracted Judge **Ken Vampola** (left) of Winnebago Tribal Court and Judge-Magistrate **David Piester** of Federal District Court. Below: **Sam Clinch**, Associate Executive Director of the Nebraska State Bar Association, peruses LSC's quarterly newsletter, The Legal Line.



LSC Vice President **Mauricio Vivero** (right) praises Nebraska for its progress in statewide justice planning, while Nebraska Legal Services Board Chair **Jim Gordon** looks on.

# Grandparent Advocacy Project Keeps Kids With Families

By Sarah T. Zaffina and Brenda R. Moynihan

When young Jonathon Rosario was placed into foster care because of parental neglect, it was a devastating blow to his grandparents, who were ready and able to provide a loving and nurturing home.

Unable to afford an attorney, Eliezer Rosario, Jonathon's grandfather, filed a petition for custody himself. When he did, the Erie County (Pa.) Family Court informed him that he did not have legal standing to seek custody of Jonathon because his own son had not been definitively established as Jonathon's father.

That's when Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLS) came to the rescue.

With the help of the Grandparent Advocacy Project (GAP), a three-month pilot program established by the LSC-funded legal aid provider, Eliezer Rosario was able to bring Jonathon home.

The Grandparent Advocacy Project provides free legal representation to low-income grandparents and other relatives seeking to care for children when parents cannot. The primary purpose of the project is to place children with loving members of their extended family who are eager and able to care for them. As a result, kids aren't sent to foster homes with strangers, but to the homes of relatives they already know, trust, and love.

As for Jonathon, he had been removed from his mother's care and placed in a foster home after Child Protective

Services (CPS) determined that he was being neglected due to his mother's drug addiction. The NLS attorney worked with the biological parents to establish paternity, giving grandpa Eliezer the standing to seek custody. In the meantime, CPS investigated the grandparents' home and concluded that it was a suitable place for Jonathon to live.

When Eliezer Rosario next appeared before the Court, an Acknowledgement

***The Grandparent Advocacy Project provides free legal representation to low-income grandparents seeking to care for children when parents cannot. The purpose is to place children with loving members of their extended family who are eager and able to care for them.***

of Paternity was entered, and the Rosarios were given custody of Jonathon for emergency foster care placement. Without the help from Neighborhood Legal Services, Jonathon likely would have remained in the foster care system indefinitely.

The Grandparent Advocacy Project was created with an initial grant of \$50,000 from the state of New York at the recommendation of the Kinship Committee of the Erie County Family Court Improvement Project. Supervising Family Court Judge Sharon S. Townsend created the Family Court

Project in Erie, Pa., with the goal of reforming local systems responsible for helping abused and neglected children find stable, permanent homes.

"[The Grandparent Advocacy Project] provides vital representation for individuals not entitled to assigned counsel through Family Court," Judge Townsend said. "Without legal advocacy, grandparents and other relatives may not be recognized as custodial alternatives for vulnerable children and [may not] have their familial rights protected."

Before the Grandparent Advocacy Project was established, low-income grandparents and other extended family members were faced with the prospect of representing themselves in court, while low-income parents were assigned a court-appointed attorney and a court-appointed law guardian also represented the child.

Since the program's inception, Neighborhood Legal Services has been overwhelmed with requests for help. An attorney is on call five days a week to provide representation. NLS has received more than 50 requests from extended family members for assistance, 16 of which came in the first two weeks of June. Currently, Neighborhood Legal Services is representing 35 grandparents and other relatives in the Erie County Family Court. The requests for representation are expected to increase, as the community becomes more aware of the project.



## ABA, LSC Laud Legislators

LSC was proud to take part in the American Bar Association's third annual "ABA Day in Washington" May 9-10 on Capitol Hill, where bar leaders from around the country gathered to lobby on issues affecting the justice system and recognize legislators committed to preserving legal services for the poor. Honored by the ABA for their work on justice issues were Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass., photo to right, with outgoing LSC President John McKay) and Reps. Henry Hyde (R-Ill., photo to left, with LSC President John N. Erlenborn), Constance Morella (R-Md.), and Fred Upton (R-Mich.).



## MESSAGE, ctd. from page 1

welcomed support of new subcommittee Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA), it was as if years of controversy and contentiousness surrounding federal legal aid suddenly melted away. LSC's funding must still make its way through the Senate, but the unanimous support of the key House panel – which for years had either called for drastic funding cuts or LSC's outright elimination – signals smooth sailing in our quest for level funding in FY2002.

We at LSC, I admit, were thrilled but unsurprised by the outcome. For years, we have been laying the seeds of a true partnership with Congress, working across party lines to build bipartisan support for legal services while dispelling lingering myths of the past about the work of LSC-funded programs. We even went to the U.S. Supreme Court to defend restrictions passed by Congress in 1996. President Bush took notice, affirming a federal commitment to equal justice by writing in his FY02 Congressional budget request that “[f]or millions of Americans, LSC-funded legal services is the only resource available to access the justice system.”

A June 16 headline from *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* sums up the current situation on Capitol Hill: LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION'S FUTURE APPEARS SECURE, AGENCY'S GOP DETRACTORS CONCEDE. Today, all of us who work in legal services ought to take a moment to pause, reflect, and celebrate. We've come a long way.

Full circle, in fact.

As a law student, private attorney, government prosecutor, legislator, and law-school professor, I have had the privilege to study, practice, enforce, make, and teach law. The words etched in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution – *to establish justice* – have been my life's credo. That's why I consider among my proudest achievements my small role in the creation of an institution worthy of our founders' noblest ideals. As a U.S. Congressman representing the suburbs of Chicago in 1974, I was one of the GOP House floor managers during consideration of the LSC Act, a bill that established a Congressionally funded organization committed to one day realizing equal justice for all.

On July 23, we mark an important anniversary borne out of our founding fathers' vision: the signing of the LSC Act, which paved the way for millions of Americans to receive legal help in non-criminal matters, such as domestic violence, child custody disputes, wrongful eviction proceedings, consumer fraud, termination of benefits, and breach of contract.

Twenty-seven years have passed since LSC's founding, yet our mission remains the same. And gratefully, on June 30, I was given the opportunity to lead the organization I've so strongly supported when I was named President by the Board of Directors just three weeks prior to LSC's anniversary.

For me, it's hard to believe there was ever a time when LSC did not enjoy broad support. In the early 1970s, federal legal aid was so popular that even a

the floor of the House.

LSC remained popular for a number of years, but a funny thing happened on the way to the 1980s. Media uproar generated by a few politically charged cases caused a near revolt by some conservatives, who perceived that LSC programs were straying from their original mission of providing basic legal help to the poor by becoming involved in cases dealing with political redistricting, abortion, assisted suicide and other divisive issues. The controversy came to a head in 1996 when LSC's budget was cut by one-third and a series of restrictions were placed on the activities of LSC-funded programs.

Though controversial in some quarters, the restrictions – and LSC's unbending enforcement of them – helped usher in a wave of increased Congressional support.



**LSC Board Chair Douglas Eakeley (left) announces new President John N. Erlenborn in Portsmouth, N.H.**

As I look back on LSC's history, I see a profoundly proud legacy. Yet I also see how much we still have to accomplish. America is a long way from realizing the promise implied in the Preamble – to establish a justice system that affords all litigants an equal opportunity to be heard, regardless of the depths of their pockets.

It's a startling reality today that an estimated 80 percent of low-income Americans are going without the legal help they need in time of crisis. The LSC Act mandates that those at or

below 125 percent of poverty will receive justice in the courts, and we know for a fact today that they do not. We owe it to ourselves, to our democracy, to make a better accounting.

LSC has assumed the brunt of that responsibility, and our progress has been promising. As President, I remain committed to continuing the Herculean efforts of my predecessor, John McKay, in making our Congressionally chartered organization a catalyst for innovation, change, and progress.

With support from Republicans and Democrats in Congress, and with all of us working tirelessly to serve the legal needs of low-income Americans, we may yet realize that seamless vision of equal justice under the law contemplated by our forefathers.

Happy anniversary, LSC.

*LSC President John N. Erlenborn was a U.S. Congressman (R-IL) from 1965-85. A version of this column originally appeared in the L.A. and San Francisco Daily Journals.*

conservative standard-bearer like Richard Nixon dared not abolish it as he sought to dismantle an array of other poverty programs administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). President Nixon successfully dissolved the OEO, but wisely heeded advisers who warned him that the elimination of two popular programs would be tantamount to ingesting political poison.

One was a program called Headstart. The other was federally funded legal services for the poor.

With the OEO abolished, momentum grew for the establishment of a new corporation to operate independently of the federal government, but whose bipartisan board would be appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Remembering the legal plight of the indigent from my days as an assistant states attorney in Illinois, I enthusiastically endorsed the creation of such a body and was proud to push for it in the Education and Labor Committee, and later on

## FAITH, ctd. from page 1

corridors of Washington, on the political talk-show circuit, and throughout the nation's churches, synagogues, and mosques.

Robust partnerships between the federal government and religious organizations may be a fairly novel, even hotly debated, idea in the nation's capital. But for the 207 local legal aid programs nationwide funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), faith-based outreach is neither a new nor especially controversial concept. It is simply a proven way to reach the clients that need legal assistance the most.

LSC programs discovered long ago that partnering with faith-based entities can be an invaluable way to let society's most vulnerable citizens, particularly seniors and poor immigrants, know that federally funded legal services are available to them.

"Without churches, I'd be in big trouble, because they are the best way to reach clients," says Giovanni Perry, a staff attorney who represents migrant farmworkers for Legal Aid of Western Oklahoma. "Churches act as a centralized information place where people can go to find out about legal aid programs and a myriad other things like health benefits and education. Many churches have already reached out to my clients, thus networking with them makes my job easier."

Perry's assessment echoes positive sentiments expressed by staffers at dozens of LSC-funded programs that have worked successfully with houses of worship and faith-based coalitions for decades. (See graphic, at right.) Whether through onsite legal clinics or referrals from religious institutions, LSC programs successfully reach out to places of worship to help clients solve a host of legal problems, such as immigration claims, housing assistance, welfare challenges, child custody disputes, breach-of-contract, denial of medical care, income-tax filings, and will-writing and estate planning.

Bridging cultural barriers is one of the biggest upsides of LSC programs' faith-based outreach with immigrants. "My clients are migrants and generally speak little English, and Spanish-speaking people that might serve as translators for potential clients are more easily found at churches than anywhere else," Perry says. "Trust is a huge issue because these people already trust their churches."

Immigration issues were particularly pressing this year following Congressional passage of the Legal Immigration Family Equity (LIFE) Act, which set an April 30, 2001, deadline for U.S. immigrants on a temporary visa to apply for a permanent one.

More than a thousand immigrants in

## Matters of Faith

*Legal aid providers offer all manner of legal services through faith-based outreach efforts. Listed below are some LSC-funded programs that utilize partnerships with religious institutions, and the type of legal help they provide to clients as a result.*

### Northwest Justice Project (Wash.)

- welfare reform, public benefits, health care and senior issues, farmworker issues

### Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Inc.

- domestic violence, housing, senior issues

### Legal Services of Northern California, Inc.

- charitable choice, housing, welfare-to-work, economic development, immigration

### Bay Area (Fla.) Legal Services, Inc.

- general assistance to non-profits, including faith-based institutions

### Passaic County (N.J.) Legal Aid Society

- housing, education, community development

### Legal Services of Southern Michigan, Inc.

- housing

### Farmworker Legal Services

(Legal Services of Southern Michigan, Inc.)

- farmworker issues, immigration

### Georgia Legal Services Program

- disaster relief, domestic violence, AIDS, farmworker issues

### Legal Aid of Western Oklahoma, Inc.

- farmworker issues

### Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.

- housing, immigration

### Legal Services Corporation of Iowa

- taxpayer clinics, immigration

### Legal Services of North Texas

- general legal clinics, housing, immigration.

### Kansas Legal Services, Inc.

- domestic violence

### Merrimack Valley (Mass.) Legal Services, Inc.

- domestic violence

### Gulfcoast (Fla.) Legal Services, Inc.

- homelessness, domestic violence.

### Ohio State Legal Services

- sponsors pro bono legal clinics

### Utah Legal Services, Inc.

- farmworker issues

### MidPenn Legal Services, Inc.

- housing, AIDS

### Legal Services of North Florida, Inc.

- housing

### Legal Services of Northeastern Wisconsin, Inc.

- housing, poverty issues

### Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc.

- domestic violence



*Legal Services of Southern Michigan co-sponsors immigration clinics at the Third Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., where legal aid staff and church officials like Sister Rosemary Tierney (bottom right) screen clients eligible to receive legal help with "green card" renewals and visa petitions.*

Western Michigan attended two immigration clinics offered this spring by Farmworker Legal Services (FLS), a division of Legal Services of Southern Michigan. Public education and processing clinics were held at Third Reformed Church of Holland, Mich., and the Peoples' Church in Kalamazoo, where a 20-minute video prepared by FLS bilingual attorneys was shown to immigrants to determine whether they would benefit from the relief offered by the LIFE Act. At day's end, hundreds of grateful immigrants left the churches prepared to mail their petitions to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Legal services lawyers frequently represent the best and only hope for foreign-born settlers seeking a chance to pursue the American dream. Ahmed Mohamed of East Dallas wants to bring his entire family

to the United States from their native Kenya. At an immigration seminar sponsored by Catholic Charities and Legal Services of North Texas, Mohamed learned his family stood a far better chance of immigrating if he became a U.S. citizen. So legal aid lawyers walked Mohamed through the naturalization process, even assisting in his preparations for a citizenship test during the spring.

Cultural barriers also make it difficult for many immigrant clients to decipher their annual tax returns. Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (LSCI), with help from an Internal Revenue Service grant, administers a Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic to clients at Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Perry, Iowa, where a large meat packing plant is located, and in several smaller com-

# Clients Take Center Stage

Federally funded legal aid programs are only as good as the services they provide to their clients. This April, Legal Services Corporation rededicated itself to this principle by holding a special "Client-Centered Conference" in Hershey, Pa. The goal was to foster a frank dialogue between clients and legal services providers about how to better serve the changing legal needs of different client populations.

Ernestine Watlington of nearby Harrisburg, Pa., and Edna Fairbanks-Williams of Fairhaven, Vt., were presented special awards for their service as the two-longest running client board members in LSC's 27-year history. And conferees left the three-day meeting with an arsenal of useful ideas on how to more effectively partner client communities with their legal services providers.



Lucy Johnson (left), a member of the local program board in Syracuse, N.Y., with Alcira Marin Kane of Lawrence, Mass.

Top left: John McKay honors Ernestine Watlington and Edna Fairbanks-Williams for their record tenure as client Board members.  
Top Right: Hafeezah Ahmad, board president of Legal Action of Wisconsin, with Veda McKnight of the Georgia Clients Council.



Michael Blau of Lansing, Mich., chats with Johnny Ritchie of Kingsport, Tenn.

## FAITH, ctd. from page 10

munities through a diocese in Des Moines. Many of the clients receiving help are Hispanic, while others are refugees from the Sudan and Bosnia. LSCI staff work with local translators to make presentations about the Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax issues and help clients fill out their tax forms.

"The presentations we make are through churches and other locations with connections to immigrant communities," says Dennis Groenenboom, LSCI Executive Director. "We have found that this is a good way to try to make connections with this group of clients."

Faith-based outreach is also an effective way for legal aid programs to help low-income clients facing the prospect of homelessness or confronting other housing issues. LSC-funded Legal Services of Greater Miami (LSMGI) offers such assistance through a partnership with the Camillus House, a homeless program of the Good Shepard religious order of the Catholic Church. LSMGI attorneys assigned to the Homeless Legal Assistance Project conduct intake once a week at tran-

sitional housing sites in south Dade County, Fla. Staff attorneys offer training for residents to help them recognize their legal rights and responsibilities, and provide legal services to those with landlord disputes.

Medical problems are also addressed as a result of referrals from houses of worship. The Northwest Justice Project (NJP) in Washington state utilized its partnership with faith-based groups to help a 52-year old woman with advanced cancer, who was in her second round of chemotherapy treatment when her medical coverage was wrongfully and abruptly stopped. A staffer at the faith-based group had attended a NJP community workshop and thought the legal aid agency might be able to help. Sure enough, NJP took the case and helped the client maintain her chemotherapy treatments without interruption and without substantial cost. NJP continues to advise the client to ensure that further confusion about her medical coverage is avoided.

"I work in a one-attorney, one paralegal office serving four counties," says the NJP's Stephen Gockley, who handles many welfare-to-work cases referred by faith-based organizations. "We have to be vigilantly concerned about efficiency in service to clients without sacrificing effective-

ness. Whenever we can partner with community groups who have ongoing involvement with our clients, the clients benefit by improved and more timely legal assistance."

Thanks to NJP, following her latest course of chemotherapy, the 52-year-old woman reports that her cancer is in remission.

Clients trusting legal services lawyers to assist them in potentially life-threatening legal disputes is a bond more easily forged when faith-based organizations are involved, says Anne Malak, a staff attorney heading the Senior Legal Services (SLS) program of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York. The SLS program, located in Albany, N.Y., specifically targets seniors in the greatest economic peril. SLS led a recent presentation entitled "Get Your Business in Order" at Macedonia Baptist Church, assisting seniors with powers of attorney and health care proxies.

"Outreach through faith-based organizations or agencies allows seniors to discuss topics that may be frightening or unpleasant for them in a setting that is familiar and safe," Malak says. "They may be more willing to come forward to receive information and to ask important questions in such a setting, surrounded by people with whom they are familiar and trust."

## UPCOMING EVENTS

August -  
September 2001

**American Bar  
Association Annual  
Meeting**

Chicago, Illinois

*Aug. 2 - 5, 2001*

**LSC Board  
of Directors Meeting**

Washington, D.C. area

*Sept. 7 - 8, 2001*

**N.Y. State Unified Court  
System: Access to  
Justice Conference**

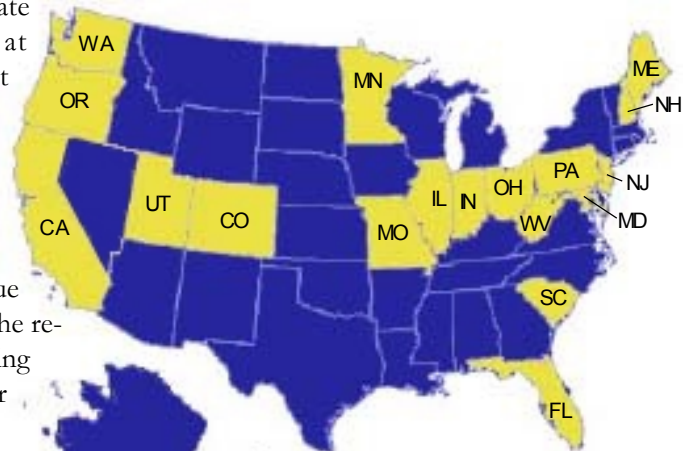
Albany, NY

*Sept 11-12, 2001*

# Building State Justice Communities

States across the country have made sweeping progress in administering legal aid since Legal Services Corporation called for the creation of "state justice communities" six years ago, according to an LSC report. "Building State Justice Communities" (available at [www.lsc.gov](http://www.lsc.gov)) identifies the 18 states most successful in implementing reforms since LSC-funded programs were required to develop integrated, state-wide delivery systems for legal services in 1995 (see map).

Although each state faced a unique set of obstacles, the 18 included in the report shared many successes: expanding state funding for legal services, better coordinating advocacy and training among programs, making the court system more responsive and accessible to self-representing litigants, reconfiguring programs to strengthen cooperation, increasing client access, more creatively involving the private bar in the delivery of civil legal assistance, better utilizing technology, and developing statewide intake systems.



- Model State Justice Community
- State Justice Community in progress



## Legal Services Corporation

750 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
Phone 202.336.8800  
Fax 202.336.8959  
[www.lsc.gov](http://www.lsc.gov)

**1** - inside -  
Keeping the Faith

**2** LSC Diversity Dialogue

**6** Changing of the Guard

**8** Helping Grandparents

Produced by the Office of Governmental Relations and Public Affairs:

Eric Kleiman, Press Secretary

Catherine Sulzer, Deputy Director of Governmental Relations

Sarah T. Zaffina, Senior Governmental Relations Assistant

Sean Driscoll, Intern

Stephanie Serrano, Intern

Perry Wasserman, Intern